

The HARPSIGHORD



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HARPSICHORD

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Requests for membership or additional information may be sent to International Harpsichord Society, P. O. Box 4323, Denver, Colorado 80204.

MOVING?

A change of address card must be on file at *The Harpsichord* office in order to receive missed issues, due to address change, without cost. Our address has changed too. Be sure to send all communications to International Harpsichord Society, P. O. Box 4323, Denver, Colorado 80204.

THE COVER

This cover, which at first appears to be non-objective art, is actually a unique line-conversion of a Go-Bar Deck used by William Dowd. It introduces the 6,500 word article on Dowd which begins on page 8.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The International Society of Harpsichord Builders is proud to give special recognition to the following Contributing Members whose interest and generosity aid materially in the development and preservation of the instruments and music of the baroque period and assists in furthering the various projects and programs of the Society.

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GO FOR BAROQUE

by *Hal Haney*



For the first time since our founding in 1967, we have planned a major membership drive. The importance of new members can not be stressed too strongly

Since Volume I, No. 1 of our journal was printed, our printing cost per issue (the amount actually paid to the printer) has increased nearly 100% and our postage has increased 30% and another increase is scheduled. The cost of packaging, addressing, affixing labels and sorting has nearly doubled. Since we have only one part-time employee (4 days a month) and everyone else donates their time and talent, it is impossible to make any saving there.

One solution, which has been suggested several times, is to raise the annual membership fee. I would only do this as a last resort. Our function is the dissemination of information and that information should be as readily available to those of modest means as well as those more financially fortunate.

We have been able to maintain our original \$8.00 membership only through the generosity of our Sustaining and Contributing Members who have given and continue to give unselfishly of their funds. The acknowledgment we give these people in each issue is indeed modest for their help can not be over emphasized.

We are hoping, also, to increase our advertising. However, we will con-

(Continued on page 7)

February March April 1971

SYMPATHETIC VIBRATIONS

WUNDERSPRINGER

OR DISASTER?

by Wallace Zuckermann

I apologize for not being ready with my promised keyboard study, which should appear in the next issue. For now, it may amuse the reader to learn that I have gone against two warnings laid down in my own book: Don't alter basic classical jack design; and don't apply for patents.



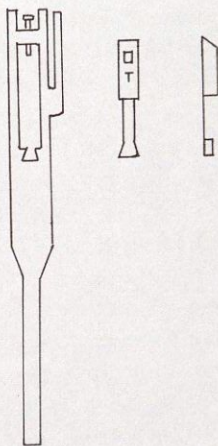
The reason that it may be worthwhile to describe my new jack design is that it tries something new, not tried before, and in evaluating the problems connected with this design we go to the heart of the baffling mechanism called a jack which we so often take for granted.

What I endeavored to do (with some help) was to eliminate the need for the axle pin which holds the jack tongue. The reason it is so important to eliminate the axle pin in plastic jacks is that the holes for this pin in the jack body and tongue are so small in diameter that they always cause production troubles, whether drilled or moulded in. If they are drilled, the thin drill has a tendency to wander and drill the hole at an angle, which naturally makes the jack unusable; if moulded, the pins which form the hole are so thin that the material, flowing in under pressure, also tends to bend them with the same result of holes not aligned or straight.

Burton has already tackled this problem with his "snap-in" tongue, in which the tongue has two round plastic extensions in place of the pin, and these extensions fit into matching

holes in the jack body. Schuetze's new jack has a little "shelf" extending from the back of the tongue (rather than in Burton's tongue sides) and this shelf fits loosely into a matching horizontal slit in the jack body. Both systems work well; both are less cumbersome in tongue insertion and removal than conventional axle pin removal.

My thought was to combine the function of the spring and the axle, thus eliminating the axle altogether. The accompanying sketch shows how this is done.



The jack itself is 7/16" wide and 5/32" thick, with a square tail, and the use of the same machine screw for top and bottom adjustment. The jack body has a dovetail depression on its back below the tongue cut-out, which matches the dovetail "bump" at the bottom of the tongue spring. The tongue has provisions for leather and delrin (the new Schuetze graduated pre-voiced plectra) but the crucial item here is the spring itself. This is 3/32" wide, 7/16" long (not including the dovetail) and .017" thick. When the tongue dovetail is pressed into the jack dovetail recess, the tongue will just come to rest against the adjustment screw at the top.

I took the gamble to get a mould made for this jack here in England where prices are considerably lower. I have just voiced the first instrument, a 2 x 8' Italian, with the new jack. If I were not inclined to look at the black side of things, I would say it works, it works very well indeed.

The advantages are obvious: this jack is most easily assembled. Two screws and the damper complete the jack body, and the plectrum insertion is all that is needed on the tongue. The dovetail press-fit takes no more than 1 - 2 seconds per jack. The tongue can easily be pushed out again, and is it simpler to exchange tongues than plectra if the need arises.

Looking closely at this jack during the actual pluck, one notes that the spring buckles somewhat while the plectrum is under pressure. I expected this to happen, but didn't know whether this would enhance or retard the action. Unlike a conventional jack where the plectrum takes ALL the pressure of the pluck, some of this pressure, perhaps as much as half, is now taken by the spring. And the more resistance the plectrum offers (i.e. a stiff or heavy plectrum) the more the spring seems to give and assume the plectrum's function.

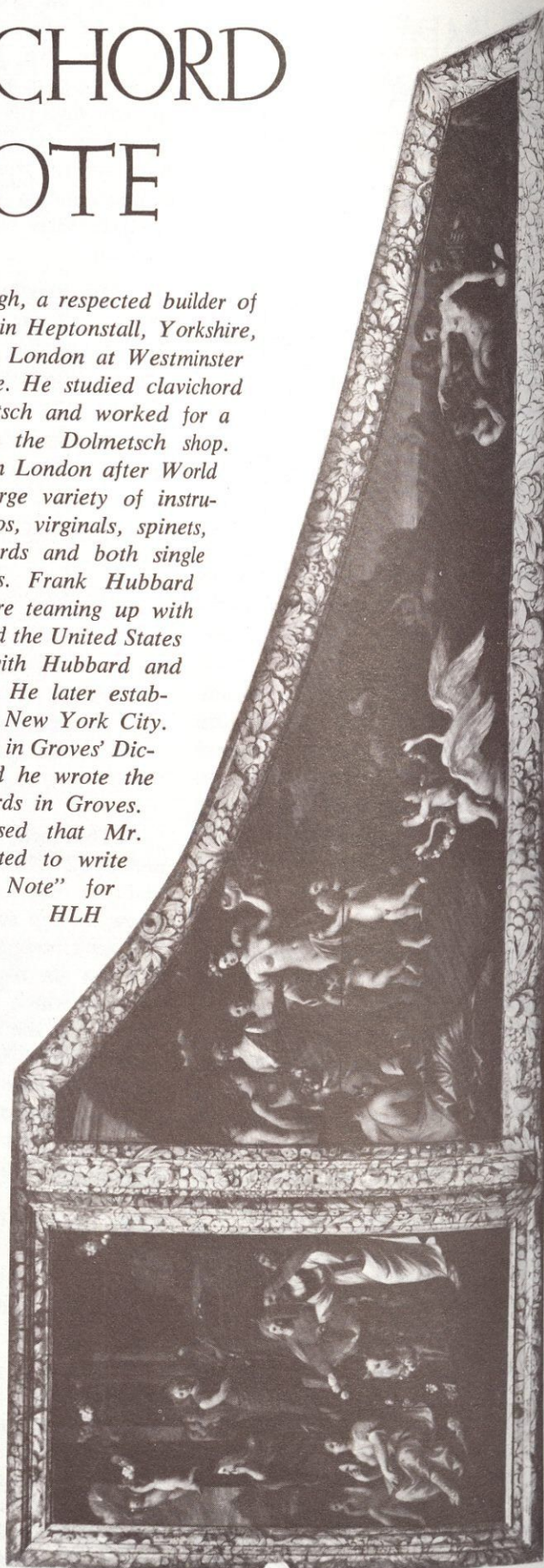
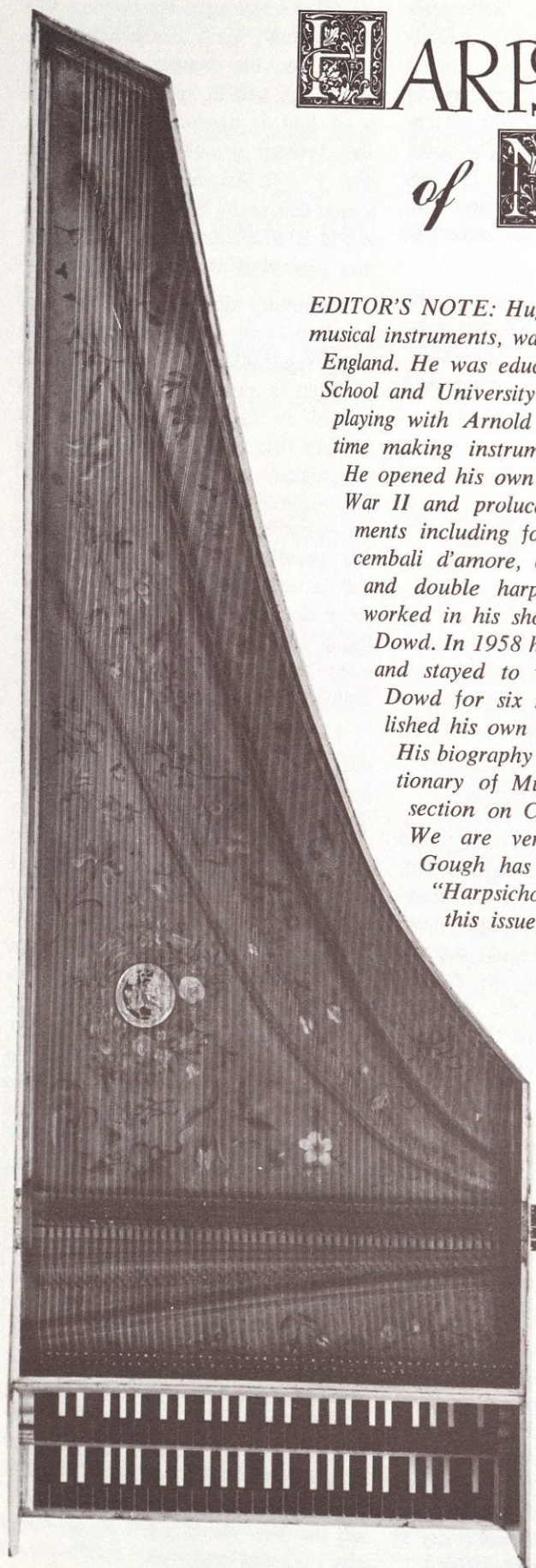
When determining the length, thickness, and shape of the spring, we had to consider not only what would be ideal for the jack, but moulding realities; as it turns out, the spring could hardly have been thinner and still allow the delrin to flow through easily. An odd feature of the jack is that if the tongue just nicely butts the adjustment screw, the spring has about the right strength as a spring. If the adjustment screw is turned down, the spring pressure increases considerably, so much so, that it is better to bend back the spring until it again lightly butts the adjustment screw in its new position in order to avoid escapement problems.

Schuetze took a look at this jack and called it a "Wunderspringer" without, however, having the chance to try it. The action in the instrument I used the new jacks in SEEMS to behave like a conventional action, but how can one be sure? Perhaps several months of continuous playing will turn up a flaw if there is one, or worse, turn up a disaster. The proof of the pudding, etc., and in the meantime we can only play . . . and pray. ☹

ARPSICHORD *of* OTE

EDITOR'S NOTE: Hugh Gough, a respected builder of musical instruments, was born in Heptonstall, Yorkshire, England. He was educated in London at Westminster School and University College. He studied clavichord playing with Arnold Dolmetsch and worked for a time making instruments in the Dolmetsch shop. He opened his own shop in London after World War II and produced a large variety of instruments including fortepianos, virginals, spinets, cembali d'amore, clavichords and both single and double harpsichords. Frank Hubbard worked in his shop before teaming up with Dowd. In 1958 he visited the United States and stayed to work with Hubbard and Dowd for six months. He later established his own shop in New York City. His biography appears in Groves' Dictionary of Music and he wrote the section on Clavichords in Groves. We are very pleased that Mr. Gough has consented to write "Harpsichord of Note" for this issue.

HLH



The harpsichord here shown was made by Hans Ruckers the younger in 1642 — a year before he died, and is one of the two last of his instruments known to survive.

On the underside of the lower keyframe is an inscription to the effect that the harpsichord was owned by Cornelis Winkelaar, organist of the Roman Catholic Church of Zanddaam, Holland, and the date, 24 June, 1832. Some time about 1870, when Frederick Leyland, the shipping magnate, was having his house in London furnished, this instrument came into his possession. It was probably acquired for him by an art dealer called Murray Marks who was known to have made extensive purchases for Leyland in Holland. The artist Whistler decorated Leyland's dining room, and the entire room — the Peacock Room — is now at the Freer Collection in Washington, together with Whistler's portrait of Leyland. That of Mrs. Leyland, also by Whistler, is in the Frick Collection in New York. Frederick Leyland died in 1892, and the harpsichord passed to the Countess of Dudley, who kept it first in London and later at her country home. In 1942 or 1943, Mr. Richard Newton, the English musicologist, bought this instrument from the late Earl of Dudley, who was her son.

Mr. Newton entrusted this instrument to Sotheby's of London, and in November of 1969 I attended the sale in London and acquired it. Mr. Newton was an old friend of mine from before the war, and I had seen the instrument and admired it greatly. It is now in my apartment in New York, and is to be used for concerts when suitable opportunity arises. Mr. Gustav Leonhardt is to play a solo recital on it in Tully Hall in New York, on April 22, 1971.

This instrument was first restored by Arnold Dolmetsch in 1896, and about 1946 was again strung and regulated for Mr. Newton by the firm of Arnold Dolmetsch, Ltd. Although the instrument is in very sound condition I have had to do further restoration.

This harpsichord was originally

a transposing instrument arranged in the standard Ruckers manner. At some time around about 1690, it was converted to an "expressive" double manual harpsichord, and probably at this time, it was decorated. The case was not in any way enlarged, but new keyboards were made to give a compass of four octaves "G short octave": that

is to say, the compass is apparently B to D — 52 notes, but the low B would be tuned to G and the C sharp and D sharp above to the A and B above that G. To accommodate the additional notes, the soundboard bridges were re-pinned, and the hitch pins increased in number. The 4' nut was left but re-pinned; the 8' nut was



replaced, with, of course, the new quantity and distribution of pins. Perhaps the original nut was split or damaged in some way.

The new keys are mounted on the old frames, with some hacking away of the balance rails; the old balance pin holes can be seen, as well as the holes for the rear guide pins. There is, of course, on the upper keyframe the mark where the wide left hand keyboard block was glued on; the original block was, of course, reduced in size.

Four new jack slides were made, and their underguides. Four new sets of jacks were made. The arrangement was the lower keyboard 8' and 4', and for the upper keyboard 8' and 4', the upper 8' jacks being dog-legged to the lower keyboard. The slides were made to project through the right hand cheek in the original manner, and the old arrangements for limiting the motion of the slides in either direction were left intact. In fact, the craftsman who altered this instrument only did the essential work — and did this with great intelligence and respect for the master's instrument. The new keys have naturals covered with ebony, the sharps being solid ox bone. The key levers themselves are of pine. It is a very comfortable and well made set of keys. The jacks are fine and delicate, and are made in beech, both jacks and tongues.

The decoration is of interest. Originally the instrument had the usual printed paper — when re-decorating, the artist just painted over this where he had to, so we have the original paper behind the key blocks where it would not show. The decoration of the inside of the lid was done, probably, by another hand. Here the original paper was removed. Various attempts have been made to identify the artist: he was certainly a Dutch or Flemish painter of the last quarter of the 17th century; there were many little known painters of such subjects. I hope that some more positive identification may eventually be reached.

I hope in the future to publish a very full description with measurements.

Hugh Gough

NEW PLECTRA

by Rev. Ronald Dahlheimer



When I built my spinet harpsichord several years ago, I used leather plectra because I wanted a rich, robust sound for use with our church music. When the instrument was finished, we were all very pleased with the tonal quality which leather produced, but it soon became evident that leather would require a lot of work if we were to keep it in top shape. Rosemont is located just south of St. Paul, Minnesota and while we are blessed with nature's own air-conditioning, the extremes in temperature and humidity are unlike most major cities in the United States or Europe.

Our leathers would go from quite stiff to rubbery in a matter of a week or so. My regular duties prohibited me from spending much time replacing, revoicing and adjusting leathers. It was important that I find some substance which would hold up well under the rather constant use my harpsichord receives.

Delrin was not the answer. While Delrin is very stable, durable and fairly easy to voice, it more closely resembles quill than leather. And I wanted to retain the full sound my parish liked so much.

I started looking around for something with the flexibility of leather, but with the strength of Delrin. I looked everywhere, but nothing seemed to work exactly the way I wanted it.

Then I found the ideal substance, right under my nose. Or, more accurately, under my chin! My clerical collar.

For years clerical collars were made of heavy, reinforced cloth which had to be starched like a board in order to hold up and look neat throughout even part of a busy day. After plastics were introduced, some bright and inventive person developed a plastic collar which always looked crisp, was easy to maintain, and did not rub one's neck raw. It was an immediate success and several manufacturers now produce these collars in rather large quantities.

The collar I found to be best for our purpose is called "Comfort Soft" and is manufactured by the R. J. Toomey Company. It is warm to the touch and feels more like organic material than plastic. It cuts easily and one collar is enough to quill one set of jacks.

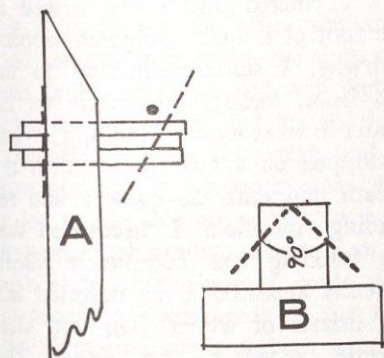
I took one of my collars, cut it to fit the jack tongue, removed a leather and inserted the plastic. The results were amazing. It was impossible for me to detect the difference between the plastic and leather. Of course, I needed to voice the plastic, but it was a fairly easy job and the sound produced was a duplicate of my original leathers.

Without hesitation, I completely requilled my spinet and since that time, my voicing and adjusting chores have been reduced to a minimum. I am no longer required to work with the instrument every time we want to use it.

If you want the rich tone of leather, it is important that you use the "Comfort Soft" collar by R. J. Toomey Company, 75 Webster Street, Worcester, Mass. 01603. Cluett-Peabody also markets a clerical collar, but it is too stiff to give a leather quality to the tone. Clerical collars are available at most church goods stores which are listed under "Church Supplies" in the yellow pages of the telephone directory. The collars I use are from St. Patrick's Guild, 1554 Randolph Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55116, but you may be able to find

a source nearer to your home. Prices vary in different parts of the country, but you should be able to buy a collar anywhere for less than \$1.00.

If your jack has an opening for either Delrin or leather (as new Zuckermanns do), use the slot for leather. Cut 3 small wedges from the plastic so they are just slightly larger than the width of the slot. Do not use the top ridge of the collar as it is too thick for three pieces and gives a colorless tone. Taper, or thin, two of these wedges at one end, place on the bottom of a three layer sandwich and pull them into the tongue with long nosed pliers as you would for leather. You'll find this plastic quite strong which reduces the danger of pulling the plectrum apart, always a possibility with leather. A cross section of your jack tongue should now look somewhat like illustration "A".



Next, using a very sharp X-acto knife, or other blade, cut all three layers of plastic as shown by the dotted line in illustration "A". Then, cut any excess plastic protruding from the back of the jack tongue as shown by the vertical dotted line in illustration "A".

Now cut a 90° point on the top layer of plastic as shown in illustration "B". (The drawing is exaggerated for clarity. The average plectrum, viewed from the top, would be proportionately longer than shown.) This point enables the string to slip off more easily after pulling the string up enough to make a good, firm pluck. You may trim corners and sides below the top layer, but do not trim support away from below the point as this will make it too weak for a firm pluck.

It is also possible to quill with the plastic collar, using only one layer of plastic, and filling the rest of the slot with a wooden wedge to hold the plastic in place. This gives a softer tone and perhaps voicing is a bit more critical, but you may want to try it.

If you have a spinet which uses metal jack slides, and you want to have perfectly fitting jacks (not absolutely necessary with the above plectra) this is possible by placing a spot of solder on the corners of the jack slide plates. In the early days of jack adjustment, a slip of paper was sometimes glued to the wayward jack, but with plastic jacks, this is not practical. After spotting the jack slide opening with solder, file the slot to an even and smooth fit using a fine triangular file. Should you err and file too much, it is an easy chore to solder again. Be sure to get the jack slide metal hot so the bond is a firm one. (Of course, I need not mention that it is necessary to remove the jack from the slide before soldering.)

I have gone one step further with my spinet. I have spot glued the wooden rail (to which the metal jack slide is screwed) to the belly-rail to further secure this member from movement. Do not glue it along the entire length, since you may want to remove the jack rail at a later date and, as always, use a water soluble glue.

In the final voicing of these unusual plectra, you may want to add a little spring pressure to the tongue. On the bass strings you may want them to pluck a little stronger. Be sure to keep enough clearance between plectra and vibrating strings so you don't create a buzz. The ultimate is to try to get as light a touch as possible and still get a firm pluck.

My spinet has retained its stability ever since I changed the plectra many months ago. It is my opinion that it should last several years if one does not let the plectra pluck harder than necessary. My calculations may not be absolutely accurate, but the clerical collar plectra are a vast improvement over leather.

Rev. Ronald Dahlheimer

GO FOR BAROQUE

(Continued from page 2)

tinue to accept only those ads which will be of interest to most members. Many publications boast of the ratio between advertising and editorial matter. Most national magazines have less than 25% editorial and more than 75% advertising. In a recent issue of *Time* magazine (not a particularly fat one) there were 120 pages inside the covers. 100 pages were advertising and only 20 pages were editorial matter. We have almost the same amount of editorial matter in each issue of *The Harpsichord*, with a much more limited circulation and income.

The real solution, of course is increased membership. This year we are investing in small space, classified advertising in *The Saturday Review*, *Hi-Fi Stereo Review*, *Musical Times* of London and *The Diapason*. We have tried test ads in *Clavier*, *The American Organist* and *Music* but found them to be unproductive for us. We'll let you know the results of the campaign as it progresses. Also, we hope that any members who have ideas for increasing membership at a minimum of cost will drop us a line. We can use all the help offered.

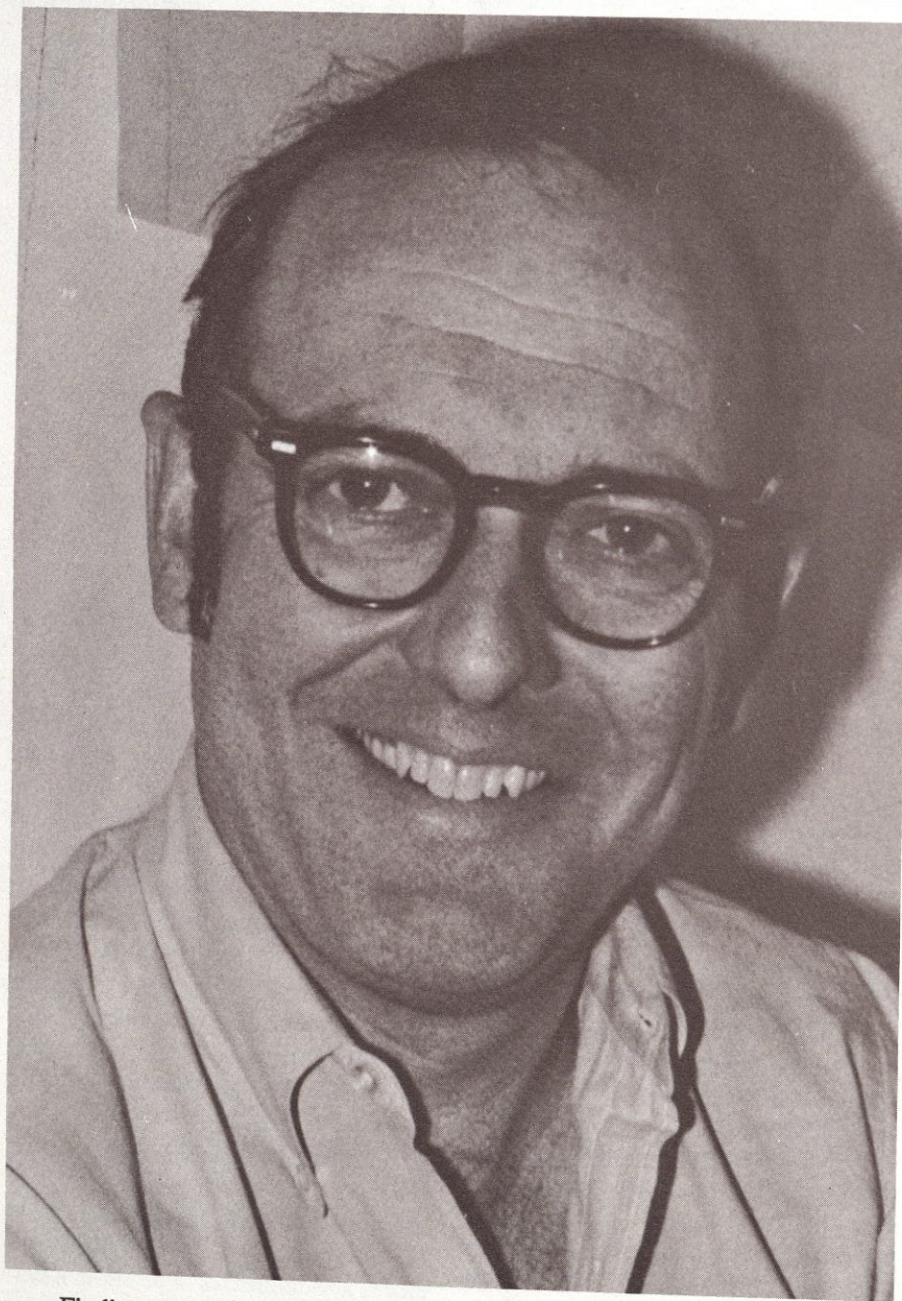
Sustaining Member Dr. George Sargent is now visiting musical leaders in France and England with the hope of increasing our membership. He is in Europe on a research project and volunteered to make contacts for us while he was there.

Another Sustaining Member, Mr. Daniel H. H. Casebeer is one of our most active "new member locaters". He has sent us a list of almost 50 names and addresses of potential members. These are sub-divided into "people with harpsichords", "people who are Baroque enthusiasts", etc. In addition, he has purchased gift memberships for many of his friends and often includes the purchase of all back issues so their library will be complete.

This gives a general idea of what others are doing to help. Anything you can add to this will be very much appreciated.

Hal Haney

PORTRAIT *of a* BUILDER



Finding 24 Thorndike Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts isn't easy. In fact, it's difficult.

After visiting with Frank Hubbard in Waltham, Mrs. Hubbard kindly drove me and my camera and recording equipment over snow and ice covered roads to Cambridge so I could be on time for my appointment with William Dowd, harpsichord maker.

I said good bye to Mrs. Hubbard in the city square where I picked

up a taxi and gave the driver the address. We rattled along for some time before we found the street. The driver stopped, pointed to a building and said "That is it right there." He drove off leaving me in the middle of a rather depressing industrial section. It was a cold, grey day and a mist of rain was falling. Even though it was almost noon, the area was quiet and gloomy. Railroad tracks were imbedded in the street and semi-trailer trucks

were parked bumper to bumper. I walked around the growing puddles of rainwater to the building pointed out by the cab driver, but no where could I see a No. 7 or a Dowd harpsichord sign.

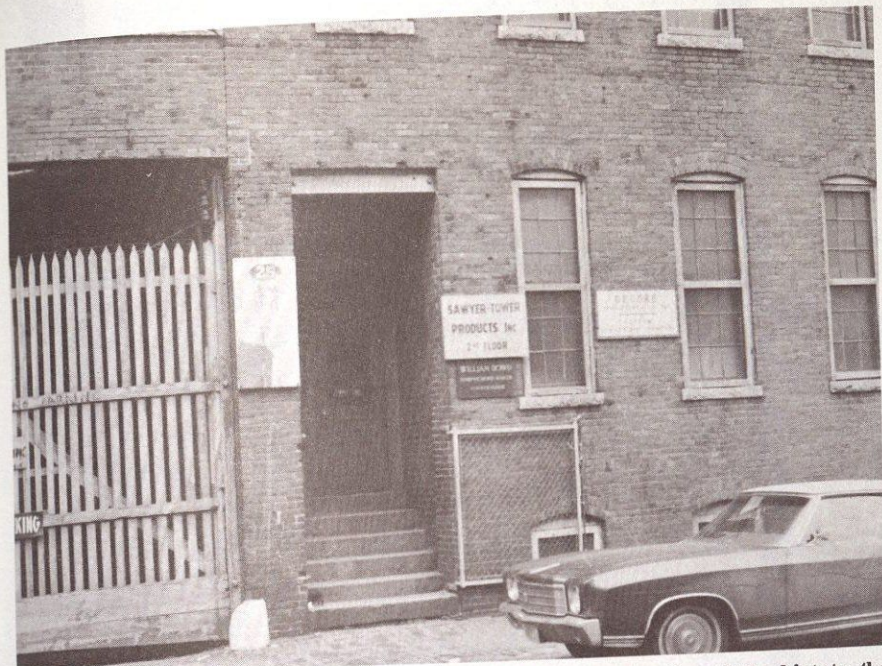
There were many signs, but most of them read AR Acoustic Research. (They make hi-fi speakers and sound systems.) After visiting several buildings, all of which were occupied by AR Acoustic Research, I found the sign for Dowd Harpsichords.

The door was up a few steps and recessed into the building. Several signs surrounded the entrance. The quietest, and most tasteful was that of Dowd Harpsichords.

I entered and found myself at the foot of a dark, unlighted wooden stairway. I started climbing to the top floor, feeling not unlike an intruder in an abandoned building. When I stopped on a landing to catch my breath and shift the camera and recording equipment, I discovered that the building was completely silent. It really appeared to be deserted and the drizzle of winter rain and sleet outside, added to the gloom. The more I climbed, the more I was sure that I had taken the wrong stairs.

I soon came to a solid door at the top of the stairs. I opened it and found myself in a small room ablaze with light. As my eyes adjusted to the brightness, I could see a large man with his back to me. He was talking to a secretary on the other side of a desk. Soon, he turned and I introduced myself to William Dowd.

He is a man of athletic stature, hearty hand shake and powerful voice. There was no question that this man was in command, and enjoyed it. His greeting was warm, friendly and sincere. He exuded an enthusiasm for his work and the people working with him. Despite his muscular frame, he moved with the grace and ease of a trained athlete, which I later discovered he was.



This elusive and unpretentious entrance to Dowd Harpsichords gives little hint to the spacious, well-lighted shop located on the fourth floor or to the beautiful instruments which are produced there.

He then took me on a tour of his shop. While the office was small and somewhat crowded, the shop area was large, spacious and well lighted with both artificial and natural light. The ceilings were extra high and the spaciousness of the work areas were a joy to see. No crowding. No doubling up. Each craftsman had his or her own shop area where he could work in peace. All work radiated out from the Shop Foreman's position who had a central location for his desk and work area.

The flow of work from one area to another was expertly planned to create the least confusion and the most efficiency. Everything and everyone was logically placed, yet there was no dehumanization or "factory" atmosphere. The departments, or more accurately, work areas, were informal and "homey". In one section, bent sides were made. In another, frames were assembled and in another soundboards were glued, each operation flowing easily into the next in an orderly manner.

Here, truly, was the ideal physical shop for making harpsichords. Every machine and tool to create better instruments was there, many of them duplicated to eliminate set-up time. Some machines are Dowd de-

signed and built especially for specific phases of harpsichord making. The steam machine for the bent side is a case in point, as is the humidity chamber where soundboards are treated up to the second they are installed.

As we walked from area to area, Dowd stressed that while machines were important, they are easy to duplicate and that the real importance lies in the professionals who use the machines. These talented people are not easy to duplicate. As I watched these people work, there was an air of calm about the shop, which was surprising when one learns the high total annual output of this shop. These professionals did not appear hurried or harried, but worked smoothly with confidence in their abilities and what must surely be affection for the work they are doing.

The only department which is completely separate from the rest of the shop is the Voicing Department, where Dowd often works late after the rest of the staff has left the building. It was in this room, equipped with 3 completed Dowd Harpsichords, that our tour of Dowd Harpsichords ended and our interview with William Dowd, harpsichord builder began.

THE HARPSICHORD: You ap-

prenticed with John Challis, and you are building an instrument which does not seem to resemble the Challis instrument in any way. Can you explain that?

DOWD: I went to Challis for experience in woodworking and instrument making and I learned an enormous amount from him. All of us owe Challis a great debt. He did start building instruments in this country before anyone else. The other thing he did was to set up a standard of professionalism. In other words, the instrument *had* to give good service, it *had* to work well. If it didn't you had to do something about it. You just couldn't build an instrument and run off.

There were some amateurs working in the late 30's and early 40's who just don't count today because they didn't really produce anything significant. I think that this is one of his great contributions to us.

I think Challis' integrity as a craftsman has been passed on to us and those people, mostly younger makers, who don't follow it are finding themselves in trouble. People now expect this high level of professionalism.

There was a revolution brewing in the late 40's and the company of



William Dowd is most often found in the shop, as far away from the telephone as he can get.

Hubbard and Dowd sort of led it. The firm of Hubbard and Dowd set this new style of building and so my history of instrument building has to be sought in that firm which covered a period of roughly 10 years.

Actually our relationship started much earlier than that. We were boyhood friends and were both in college together. We decided to make harpsichords when we were still in college, after World War II.

THE HARPSICHORD: This was before you were with Challis?

DOWD: Oh yes. Frank Hubbard was two years ahead of me and graduated before the war, went into the army, then returned to get his Master's degree. I left, came back four years later and got my AB degree. We were both in English Literature and both presumably headed down that long, dark, drainpipe toward a Ph.D and finally winding up teaching English somewhere.

I had been in love with the harpsichord ever since I was a freshman and first saw one.

THE HARPSICHORD: Where did you see this instrument?

WILLIAM DOWD: The first one I actually saw was in the music department at Harvard. It was built by Chickering. It was the one I first heard Ralph Kirkpatrick on. In fact Kirkpatrick saw this instrument when he was a freshman, and that started him out. It had been at Harvard since 1915 or so. It was supposed to be in working order but it had fallen into disuse, between Ralph's period there and mine. Actually a classmate of mine was Dan Pinkum and he sprung the thing loose again. In those days, when harpsichords were rare, and no one knew what they were, an instrument could sit locked up in a room for years. Danny applied to the powers that be and brought the instrument back into use.

One of my teachers was Erving Fine a brilliant young composer, and I asked him about it. He took me in and opened up the instrument. When I saw it for the first time, it was so beautiful and marvelous it took my breath away. A little while later, I



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ANTVS

FLORERE FACIT

This beautiful instrument by William Dowd shows what can be produced when superior craftsmanship and dedication to historical accuracy are combined. The exterior is finished in dull-finish paint in subdued colors while the interior is ablaze with printed paper, stenciled borders and gaily painted soundboard. This harpsichord has a shove coupler operating on the upper keyboard. The jack slides operate directly through the check board as was the case in very early instruments. This arrangement predates hand stops located on the name board as well as foot pedals. Most important of all, the instrument sounds as beautiful as it looks.

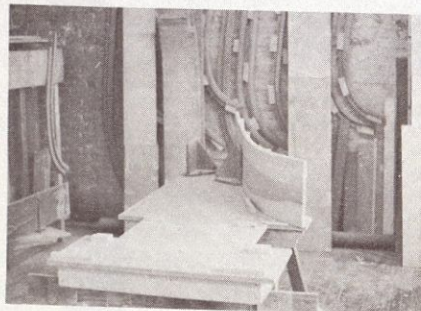
Carol Rankin, Photographer



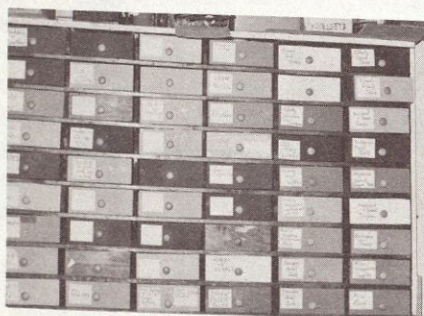
Several wood presses are used to make bent sides. They are located next to the steam chamber which prepares wood for bending.



Bent sides, when completed, move to a storage area where they are aged before installation is begun.



A jig is used to position the bent side properly. The photo shows a bent side in position ready for assembly.



Neatness is important to the Dowd shop. Here drawers hold such items as "Keyboard Hold Down Things", "Crow Quill", "Elderly Key Buttons" and one drawer is marked "Domes of Silence".

heard it in a concert at the museum of fine arts played by Claude Jean Chiasson.

THE HARPSICHORD: *Could you tell us something about Mr. Chiasson?*

WILLIAM DOWD: Well, he belongs to this murky period of harpsichord construction. He built his first instrument around the late 30's or early 40's. It was a monster which he called Pedrophenia (Queen of the Amazon). He gave a recital at the Museum of Fine Arts with a singer. I went to the recital and he gave a little speech first and laughed while he explained that the harpsichord didn't work very well and he might have to stop in the middle of a number and crawl under it to fix it. At the time I thought "How charming." My attitude toward that now is "How awful!"

This all happened in my freshman year and that summer I went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and saw their large collection of instruments. That was before it was closed from public view for the next 25 years, or something like that. In those days, you could go see the instruments and I went often and studied them carefully.

I have always been handy with my hands. I had done work on my boat, made models when I was a kid and had the feeling that I could make anything if I studied it long enough. So I decided to make a harpsichord.

I started that summer, but didn't get very far and it carried over into the next year when the war came along and I left on a destroyer.

After I got out of the service I returned to college and while my major was English. I took as many music courses as I could. I was much more sophisticated about music by this time. Frank decided to build a fiddle. He was a violinist. I decided to build another harpsichord and this time I bit off a great big one, a big double. Well, that one didn't get very far either. Frank had already built a clavichord and it was during this time that we decided to do what we really wanted. Why be tyrannized by the academic world? Let's do it.

Frank was, by this time, married

and he and his wife figured out a way they could go to England where Frank would work under Dolmetsch. So he did.

I was flat broke at the time and used up my last dime getting through college. I tried to figure out a way to make it to Europe. One crazy idea I had was to get on the Olympic rowing team, since that was an Olympic year, and I could get to Europe that way. It almost worked. We broke the world record during the trials, but someone else came along and broke it better.

Then I contacted John Challis to see if he could use me, and as luck had it, he could. Challis was the most famous builder in America and Kirkpatrick and other artists were using his instruments. A Challis was *the* instrument to own.

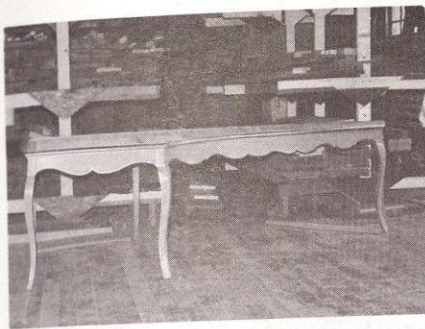
Frank discovered that with Dolmetsch it was rather a case of the blind leading the blind. Arnold was dead. Carl was mainly interested in recorders. Rudolph had been killed during the war and he was probably the most brilliant of them all. Old man Dolmetsch was a tyrant. His children were to learn only what *he* thought they should. In fact that is why Rudolph left, in order to receive a well rounded education. It is said that when Rudolph was about 18 years old, he got to London and heard a Schumann Symphony for the first time! He just flipped out.

The person in charge of harpsichord making at Dolmetsches was Leslie Ward who married one of the Dolmetsch daughters. He was an excellent craftsman but no artist. Frank later went to London and spent most of his time in the British Museum and worked with Hugh Gough who was an excellent builder. Hugh has since moved to New York. At this time, Hugh was a young man just out of the R.A.F. and he was setting himself up as a builder.

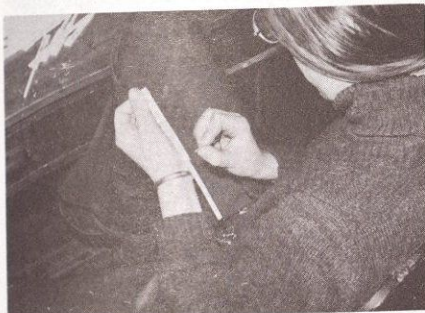
I went to Challis and had a very, very successful year and a half there.

Frank came back and we set up our shop together.

The two experiences were extremely good for both of us. I had



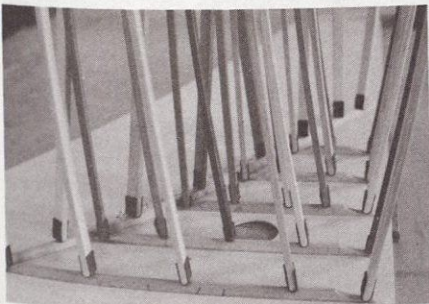
The base of a harpsichord, in the shop for restoration, awaits the instrument which is being worked on in another department.



Each jack is carefully assembled and checked by hand. Here an employee removes minute excesses of plastic.



The Go-Bar Deck is used for many building operations. Here the ribs are being installed on the under side of a soundboard.



A close-up shows how effectively the Go-Bars keep constant pressure on the ribs to assure a tight and secure bond.

learned a lot of discipline and quality control. And, of course, Frank had benefited from his experiences in Europe.

The first instrument we built, which is at this moment in the other room being restored, was a darn good instrument. In fact, it was rather revolutionary.

You see, one of the things that happened to us was that we went to museums. When it was possible, we heard these instruments and found them beautiful. We felt that the whole German school, Neupert, Whittmayer, and Pleyel, who is sort of the chief anti-Christ of them all, must all have plugs in their ears. They were not making anything that was remotely like an antique harpsichord.

And of course, no one in Europe had clue one as to what we were facing in climate here in America. When John Challis was working with Dolmetsch they were building beautiful instruments, but they weren't suitable for American climate. When John returned, he insisted on building an instrument that would hold up here. During John's last years with Dolmetsch he was working on the new Patent action which Dolmetsch loved. *THE HARPSICHORD: What is the Patent action?*

DOWD: Well, it is a dark period in the history of the harpsichord and it became Arnold Dolmetsch's chief love. It was an all consuming passion. Arnold Dolmetsch seemed to have a genius for doing something right the first time then going down hill after that. And the Chickering instruments were the best things that were made in modern times until, if I may say so, Frank and I started building. The Patent action was a system which permitted the plectra to pluck the string, then move away from the string so it did not brush against it on the return stroke. It was an escapement mechanism somewhat like that used in a piano. The trouble with it is, that it has the piano characteristic.

The one great difference between the hammer action and the plucked action is that the hammer is in contact with the string for the first semi-

vibration. The hammer does not get away from the string any faster than it is pushed away by the string. It's in that particular split second that you dampen out certain overtones which produces the characteristic piano sound. With the plucked action, the string is first lifted, then released completely creating the sound. Therefore there is no dampening out at that point. Of course, the harpsichord string is not set into a precise up and down motion. The string rolls off the plectra which creates a somewhat oval motion of the string, creating an additional special quality to the tone which is not done in the piano. A string which is plucked sideways has a different quality from one which is plucked straight up and down. And of course, a combination of both of these actions has some of the quality of both of them.

But back to this Dolmetsch action. It just wouldn't work. It was necessary to take the keyboards out just to make a jack adjustment. One couldn't play "Three Blind Mice" on the thing without having to take the instrument apart. It was under constant maintenance. You never had a chance to play the instrument, you were, instead, maintaining this new system. It was absolutely absurd.

I saw one of these instruments and had had one described to me in purple prose by John Challis. This was probably one of the things which made John insist on building instruments which *must* work. John also believed that you should make an action so foolproof that the customer would not have to get into it, much like a good watch. You don't expect the owner ever to open it up. It's nice if you can do it . . . and he has come damn close.

On the other hand, what Frank and I had done was listen to antique instruments very carefully and what we heard was beautiful. We discovered a resonant, flowering sound which we liked. And in a way we were being led on by antiquarians. This is certainly part of our heritage. We know more about our past than any society which has ever existed. Including the

Renaissance. We have applied scientific method to historical research. That, combined with an almost neurotic preoccupation and interest in our past has produced a great amount of knowledge. You know whether Stonewall Jackson had a cold on a night of a battle.

The reappearance of the harpsichord was the beginning of it. By the time Frank Hubbard and I came along, we were a generation younger than this. We were getting into the next phase of harpsichord building. We, with the enthusiasm and rash brashness of the young, believed we knew how to bring back the authentic instrument upon which early harpsichord music was all based.

We had almost immediate success. We had strong patrons. Our first instrument went to Dunn, at that time a harpsichodist who is now an excellent choral conductor and our second instrument went to Albert Fuller. It has been going on from there ever since.

Basically what we are trying to do is build instruments in the antique style. The fact that they look like antiques is fun, but that is unimportant. That fact that they *sound* like antiques is extremely important. Because we are trying to play that music, in their way, and train ourselves to get their esthetic kicks from it. Otherwise, we might as well play it in our style, in our way, and forget it.

The further in we get, the more fun we have experiencing their experience, and having their esthetic values become ours. We can never forget the fact that we are living several hundred years later. Mozart, Schumann, Brahms and Stravinski have all existed and we can not forget it, I think some people are trying to forget it but they are idiots. All musical people have this in their background, but we are trying to find out what that music was like in its time because it obviously was so important to them.

THE HARPSICHORD: Some of your instruments are equipped with pedals which was not true of early instruments. What is your reasoning here?

DOWD: I have tried to win wars rather than battles and I found that if a war was being fought, it could be fought on a level other than pedals. If someone wants to mess up his instrument with pedals, then that should be his problem. After all, 10 years ago, it was almost completely impossible for us to believe that any professional harpsichordist would ever play without pedals. Now they do. And I believe I can take more credit for that than other builders can. Had I presented them with our current modern instrument at that time, they wouldn't have accepted it. They wouldn't have played it.

The three great controversies have been, in this order: the 16 foot choir, quill vs leather, and now pedal. To me pedals are dying. I talk people out of them if I can. If they insist on pedals, I will install them.

THE HARPSICHORD: Do you think you may go back even further and use the direct action slides which are operated from the side of the case?

DOWD: I already have. It depends on the style of the instrument. Of course all these things are important, but the essential thing is the sound

and what can be done musically with that sound.

There are some instruments which are not particularly beautiful, and yet musically, they are more beautiful than others. The way you can go from one note to the next, and the way you can phrase on it. Some instruments you can't do anything on.

Landowska always played with a certain type of touch. It was necessary because of the Pleyel she used. And of course she did wonders on it too, but she didn't have anywhere near the flexibility of touch that someone like Leonhardt or Kirkpatrick has. Pedals are certainly unimportant compared to the feel of the action. They don't affect it at all. It has taken us a long time to get back to an instrument that felt like a good antique action. I have picked the French instruments because at that time they were turning out the best harpsichordists and the best instruments. Everybody says they are incredibly light . . . they are not. They are incredibly fast. The key comes back faster than you can get your finger off it. They are not heavy either when you consider actual physical weight. We have been making



This unique Dowd keyboard was a special order and permits the use of two tuning systems on the same instrument. For example, a true A sharp plus a B flat are possible by dividing one key into halves and giving each half a string. Other keys are similarly constructed. This method of key arrangement was sometimes used in early instruments.

actions as light as good antique instruments for some time but we weren't making them quite with the feel of these instruments. Once again, some of that was caused by artists who wanted more of the feel of a piano, instead of an authentic harpsichord. It has always been the young man, who is just starting as a harpsichordist, that we have been able to tell to try the faster, lighter instrument. And bit by bit the other players, at least those who are sufficiently flexible, have come along.

As recently as three years ago Albert Fuller was playing a leathered instrument with a 16 foot and pedals. He is now exclusively playing instruments with hand stops and 2', 8' and a four and quill.

THE HARPSICHORD: *What are your opinions of Delrin vs actual quill?*

DOWD: When I use the word quill, I actually mean Delrin. One has to re-examine this all the time. I can make a statement which I would be willing to be burned at the stake for, and later realize how wrong I was. I've seen this in the past. But right now, I think the only difference between Delrin and real quill is that it is possible to voice

Delrin a little more loudly if you want to do so. And one must be careful not to do this unless there is a real reason for it. I have inserted properly voiced quill in an instrument using Delrin, by just dropping one in here and there, and you can't find them without looking. Neither can I find them by touch.

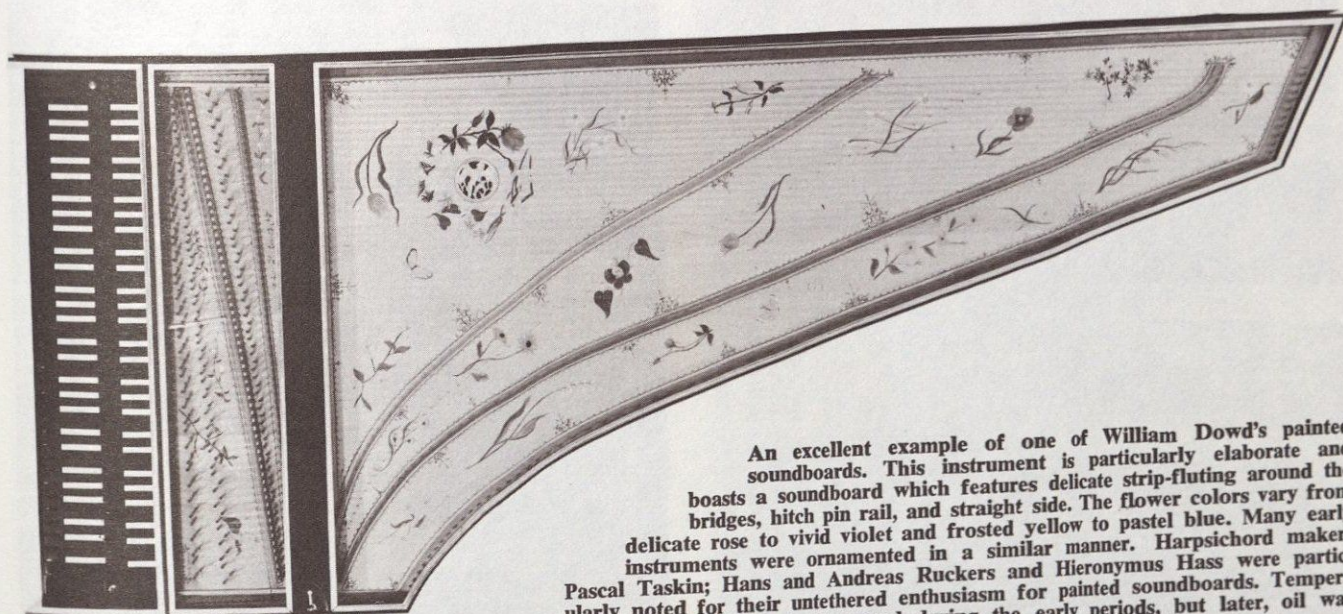
As far as leather is concerned, leather, as we knew it from the Dolmetsch time on was just not made of 18th century material at all. When Dolmetsch started, he started with the decadent harpsichord of 1790 when they were trying every trick of the trade to see if the instrument couldn't still live against the piano. These were the instruments with pedals, knee-levers, drums, bird calls and everything else tacked on. They were trying to make as many different sounds as possible. Some had an 8 and 4 on the lower in leather and an 8 on the top with quill. You didn't have an ensemble. When you get back to the real harpsichord they weren't nearly so concerned about how differently each choir would sound from each other but how they would blend and how they would be different shades of

the same voice. You have heard a great tenor who can sing from the back of his throat and, when he wants to, change the position of the voice projecting it from just behind the teeth, either a head tone or a chest tone. However, it's still the same man. This is what a good harpsichord could do.

Actually the basic sound of the harpsichord is two 8's. Then if you want to beef it up for full harpsichord then add the 4' choir. Older harpsichordists, frequently used a 4 and 8, while today, we would use two 8's.

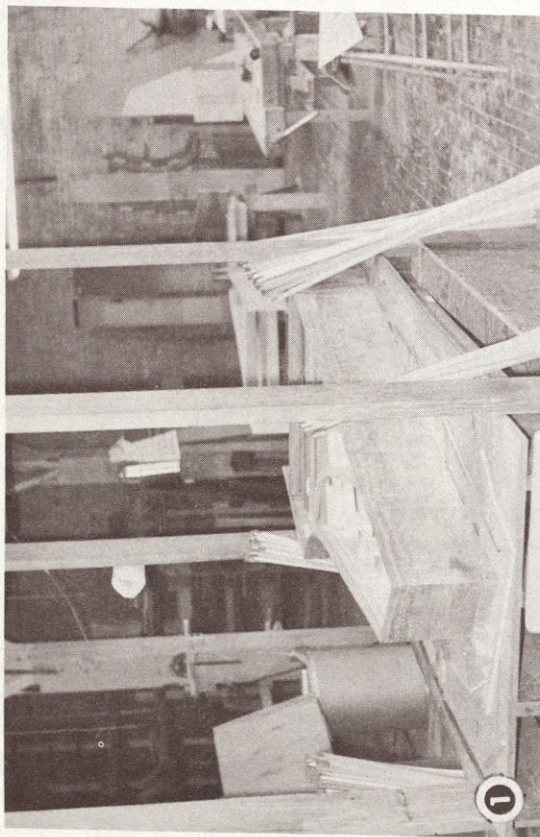
The classic harpsichord of Couperin and Rameau was a three jack harpsichord. They very seldom had four sets of jacks. Two 8's, a 4' and coupler, and that was it. It's all you need. Of course some instruments had a *Peaude* baffle stop, which was a legitimate stop, but it should be realized that it is late 1769, 1770. It's a very soft, leather, buffalo, and it just goes fooosh over the strings. It's for playing charming Alberti bases. That's the period.

THE HARPSICHORD: *When you build that stop into an instrument, do you use real buffalo?*



An excellent example of one of William Dowd's painted soundboards. This instrument is particularly elaborate and boasts a soundboard which features delicate strip-fluting around the bridges, hitch pin rail, and straight side. The flower colors vary from delicate rose to vivid violet and frosted yellow to pastel blue. Many early instruments were ornamented in a similar manner. Harpsichord makers Pascal Taskin; Hans and Andreas Ruckers and Hieronymus Hass were particularly noted for their untethered enthusiasm for painted soundboards. Tempera was the medium most often used during the early periods, but later, oil was also used.

Photo by Kimball, Rankin



A Dowd harpsichord, ready for soundboard, has just been placed on the "Go-Bar" deck. The go-bars, (flexible wooden slats with felt covered tips) are placed at each corner of the deck ready for use.



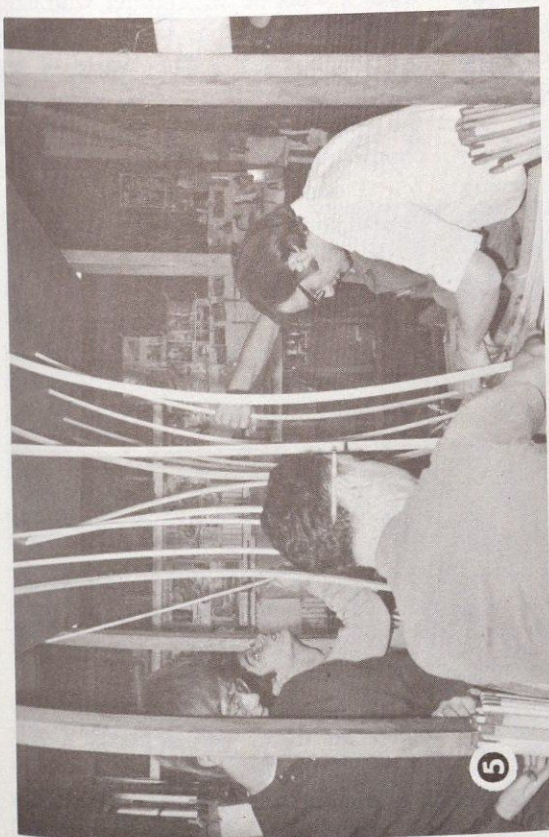
The four corners of the Go-Bar Deck become stations with a man assigned to each corner. The interior of the instrument is brushed clean of any wood dust which may have accumulated during assembly.



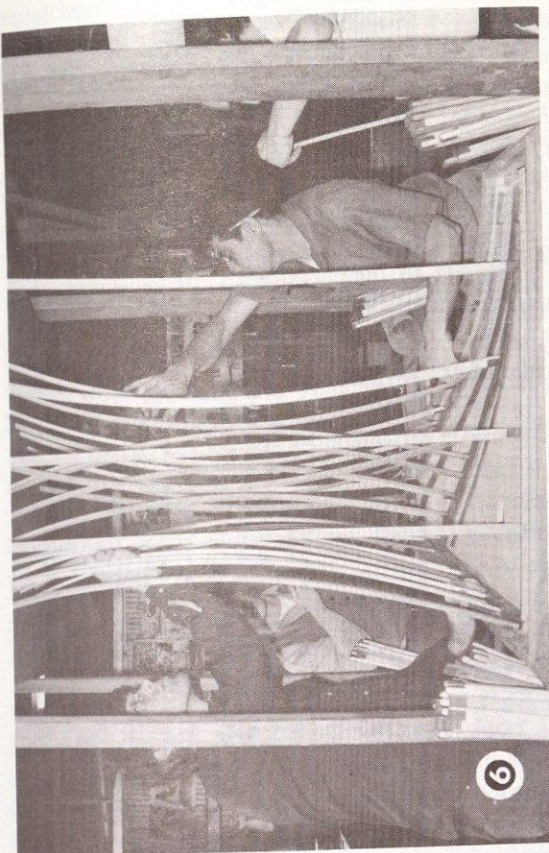
While the soundboard is being treated in a humidity controlled atmosphere, the glue is applied rapidly and efficiently. Each man has a brush and covers his part of the instrument.



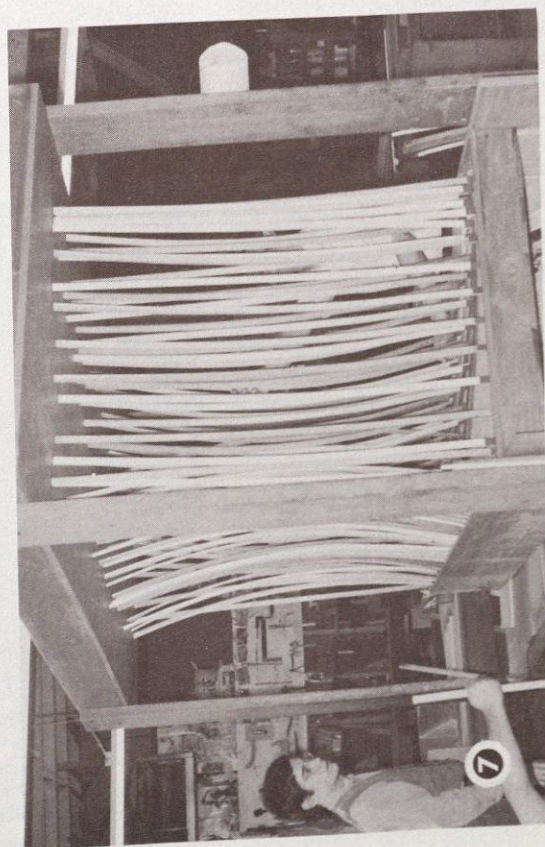
Within seconds the soundboard is removed from the treatment cabinet and put in place. The glue is not given a chance to cool before the soundboard is installed. This assures a secure bond. Strips of wood are placed over the pressure points to equalize pressure and eliminate marring of the soundboard.



Each man, working from his corner starts forcing the Go-Bars between the soundboard and the ceiling of the Go-Bar Deck. They start from the center and rapidly work out, which distributes the glue evenly.



Within seconds the area is covered. Then without delay, the spaces between the major Go Bar's are filled. Notice how the Go Bars are staggered so that they don't interfere with each other.



Within about 40 seconds nearly all Go-Bars are in place. They now stand so thick that workers on the far side of the Deck are just barely visible.



The job is now finished and the men go back to other duties, leaving the soundboard to bond to the instrument. The care and efficiency with which the soundboard is installed, is one of the reasons Dowd harpsichords have such clarity of tone and carrying power.

WILLIAM DOWD: We use buckskin. I have actually used buffalo and I would like to if I had a good steady supply of high quality. The buffalo now available from French piano stores is very coarse. The best I have seen has come from old military supply houses. These were the cross belts of the 18th and early 19th century military uniforms. It was also the buff facing which Calvery uniforms were lined with. When the jacket was buttoned back, you saw the buff facings. It is the same word which is used for the buff stop in English. I use buckskin most of the time for that. It has replaced buffalo in the piano trade.

The hard leather produced a whole style of playing which the Kirkpatrick school began to love when the leather was almost worn out. Then they could get slight dynamic control. We have since learned that one can get far more control with a good quilled instrument, not with dynamics, but they can keep fooling you into thinking that they are. I've heard Kirkpatrick play a Mozart sonata on two 8's without touching anything and you would swear that his arpeggios were sliding from one string to another. They obviously were not, but he has tricked you into thinking this by the way he will expose a note, and cover a note and expose another note and this is the essence of real harpsichord playing. This is what the good harpsichordists could do in the 18th century. That's why I think pedals are meaningless. They are just putting something in your way. The people who get rid of them, finally get to know the real joy of just sitting down and playing the harpsichord.

THE HARPSICHORD: Do your instruments use shove couplers?

WILLIAM DOWD: Oh yes. Even on the pedal instruments. I think that's important. One of the reasons is that the normal pedal coupler has a rod rubbing up and down against a rail which adds friction. With a shove coupler, there is no more friction than there is with a hand stop. One of the lovely things, too, about the shove coupler is that the upper keyboard, lifts out completely and easily with

one simple motion.

THE HARPSICHORD: Do you use plastic jacks?

WILLIAM DOWD: Yes I do. I also make wooden jacks for the aficionado who likes them. I like them too. My slides are just like antique French slides. They are leather covered slides which are marvelously quiet.

THE HARPSICHORD: Now that you are securely established in the harpsichord business, where do you plan to go from here?

WILLIAM DOWD: I think it would be easier to say where do we go from here? I think I can honestly say that I am one of the two, if not the leader of this movement. My difference with Frank Hubbard has been mainly of emphasis, not of basic philosophy. The parting came when he went to Europe about 12 years ago to do research for his magnificent book *Three Centuries of Harpsichord Making* published by Harvard University Press. He was gone for about two years and during that time, I reorganized the shop. We had been down in the south end of Boston which is the local skid row and a very horrible workshop where we had to carry coal all day. Well, I began to think, why should we carry coal when we could be making harpsichords. We saved perhaps \$100 per month rent, but we could have made \$500 a month if we made harpsichords instead of carrying coal.

Frank never liked to do the same thing twice, and I did. I also felt that we had come to a point where we had produced some excellent instruments but we really hadn't done anything with them. We were years behind in orders and were making enemies because we weren't producing anything on time. Of course, I'm telling my side of the story. If Frank were telling it, the emphasis would be different, so please forgive me. Read between the lines, and water down what I am saying, and you will probably find the truth in there somewhere. But at any rate, Frank was much more interested in making one instrument then making another one of a different kind. I felt that the time had come

to produce instruments in an orderly, organized way, without getting so large that I would loose touch with what I was doing. And there is danger in that.

For me this has been extremely rewarding. Most of what it takes to make a fine harpsichord can be taught to any first-class professional . . . not to any college drop-out who is in love with making harpsichords. And the world is filled with those. I have about three people a week who want to work for me. And what do they know? Nothing! They don't even really want to build harpsichords, they want the life style of a harpsichord maker. Now I am very careful of my apprentices.

THE HARPSICHORD: How do you select your apprentices?

WILLIAM DOWD: It's getting a little overloaded right now. I don't want to have more than one, or at the very most, two, apprentices in the shop at one time. It takes up too much of our time. I have had a number who have been successful with me, and gone on to build instruments on their own and are doing good work, but when I think of the number who have gone away and done nothing, I shudder at the waste. The waste of my effort to help them, their effort and the whole thing. We do train our competition, and that's important.

I don't want to expand. I'm the biggest producer now of the handmade makers. I don't want to get any bigger. As it is now I spend most of my time answering the telephone.

As an example, I like to paint soundboards. It has nothing to do with good harpsichord making but I love doing it. Suddenly I have five orders, all in a row for painted soundboards, all of whom specified me as the painter, and I can't do it. That has knocked three weeks out of this year. I don't have that three weeks to spare. If I worked alone I could do that.

On the other side, we produce about 30 to 35 harpsichords a year which means that our customers have a reasonable expectation of getting one. There are now over 200 Dowd

harpsichords in the world, which is tiny to some makers, but it is a reasonable amount.

But back to where we will go.

My own feeling is that for makers like me and my followers, and Frank and his followers, we will continue to refine what we have already done. We no longer believe that there is any such thing as the eclectic harpsichord, the perfect, all-around harpsichord. I think that this instrument we are now producing is as close as we can get. I think that most of the young builders will continue to explore the 18th century.

Most of our followers have so far been imitative. That is, they have not experimented. I think what Frank and I have perhaps proved is that there has been too much innovation. For example, some builders started out to build a harpsichord by trying to find new materials and new methods to build a harpsichord jack before finding out that the old harpsichord jack works better than some modern jacks. Now then, he just started with the assumption that since we were in the 20th century, the 20th century ways of doing things are better without even examining the old methods or instruments. These old actions will repeat faster, were lighter, were more sensitive than anything modern builders were making. And the sound of these instruments was glorious.

In a way there is nothing wrong about being innovative. People say Stradivarius was an innovator. He wasn't an innovator. He made the most minute changes from his predecessor Amanti who made the most minute changes from his father, and his grand father and his great grand father. Four or five generations of makers, all working and refining their instruments.

That is what we are doing now. Refining.

The great jump has been made.

William Dowd

HARPSICHORDS ARE WHERE YOU FIND THEM

Part of a letter to Sir James Jeans from H. F. Stewart, 30 Thompson's Lane, Cambridge, written February 18, 1903. Sir Jeans was only 26 years old at the time. This was 33 years before he met and married the lovely and talented Susanne Hock (Lady Susi Jeans.)

"With regard to a harpsichord, I know of no place where they are stocked. Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch whose address it will be easy to discover, could doubtless put your friend into the way of acquiring one. Those that I have knowledge of have all been picked up in farmhouses here and there and have been entrusted to Dolmetsch's care for repairs and tuning."



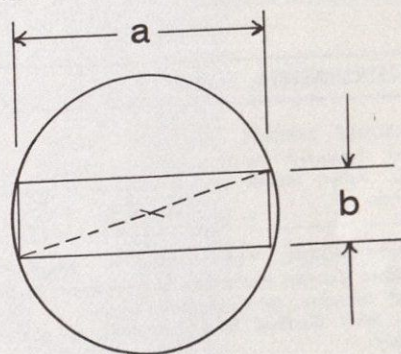
William Dowd is shown during one of those rare, quiet moments (after an instrument is finished and the voicing is complete) when he can sit down and play for his own enjoyment. Here is the perfect combination of historian, builder and musician brought together in one exceptional man.

LETTERS

Dear Hal,

"The Harpsichord" continues to be filled with interesting notes and articles, and I look forward to each issue with enthusiasm.

I want to make a remark about Mr. Zuckermann's piece about jacks. I don't agree with several of his ideas, but one of his statements particularly puzzles me. He mentions more than once the necessity of having square tails on jacks, so that they can be used in round guide holes. Why on earth is it necessary for them to be square? Any rectangle can be guided by a circular hole, (see diagram) and squareness is no advantage at all, as far as I can see.



$$\text{DIAMETER OF GUIDE HOLE} = \sqrt{a^2 + b^2}$$

John M. Reed
Lincoln, Mass.

ZUCKERMANN ANSWERS

Mr. Reed is right, of course; I realized my error before he pointed it out but it was too late to change the column. Nevertheless, a square tail has two advantages: (1) it reduces the weight of the jack to a minimum (2) if end pins are to be avoided, it offers the best means of guiding the jack in the lower guide. If a rectangular jack is 1/2 inch in diameter, which is not feasible with keys being placed only 1/2 inch apart. The square tail offers the smallest guide hole (short of the use of end pins) and with multiple sets of jacks this is a definite advantage.

Wallace Zuckermann
North Devon, England

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